

Talking With Kids

Getting to know you...

- What is the nicest thing that ever happened to you?
- What was the funniest thing you ever saw?
- What was the proudest moment in your life?
- What do you like best about yourself?
- What are three things you do well?
- What are three things you like best in a friend?
- What are three things you like least in others?
- What worries you the most?
- What was your worst disappointment?
- What are two things you would like to change in your life?
- What is the biggest decision you are facing right now?
- If you could make one rule for all the people in the world to follow, what would it be?
- If other people were going to describe you as an animal (or a color or an object, etc), what would they say you were most like?
- What do you like least about yourself?
- What is something about you that you wish were different?
- What have you always wanted to be able to do in your life?
- What are three things in your life you think you can't change?
- What are your favorite things to do?
- What do you do when you are all alone?
- What do you dream about?
- What songs do you know? How does it go?
- What games do you like to play? Who plays them with you? Who taught them to you?
- What do you think about just before you go to sleep at night?
- What do you dislike or hate to do?
- Do you know how to cook? What is your favorite thing to make?
- What is your favorite food? Restaurant?
- Do you like being indoors or outdoors best?
- Are you a morning person or a night person?
- If you could be any animal, what would you choose, why?
- How old do you think you will be when you die? How do you think that might happen?
- What is your favorite place to be?
- If someone was going to write a newspaper article about you, what would they say? What would you want them to make sure to leave out?
- Do you think you look different than other kids your age? If so, why?
- If you had three wishes what would they be? Which one would you want to come true first?
- Finish this sentence: If I really wanted to, I know I could...
- Suppose you were going to be stuck on a desert island and you could only take three people with you. Who would you choose? Why?
- If you were in charge of this country, what three laws would you create?

What is your favorite movie? TV show? Cartoon? Music? Book?
 Describe your life in 10 years. In 5 years. In one year. In one month.
 If you could change places with anyone in the world for a day, who would you choose and why?

How do you feel...?

What do you do when you are angry? Sad? Happy? Frustrated? Afraid? Etc.
 Tell me about a time you felt angry? Sad? Happy? Frustrated? Afraid? Etc.
 When you are feeling lonely, what is the one thing that helps you the most?
 Describe the feeling "sad" (or mad, happy, peaceful, etc.) for me; what color is it, what shape, what temperature, what texture, etc.?
 What scares you?
 Do you ever have nightmares? Tell me about it...
 What was your favorite dream? Why?
 When you think about your future, what are you most concerned about?
 What has your family taught you about feelings?
 What is the strongest feeling you have ever had? Tell me about when that happened.
 When you need to calm yourself down, how do you do it?
 Who can you trust to share your feelings with? How do they help you?
 When you upset, what helps you calm down?
 What kinds of things help you feel safe? Calm? In control?

Friends and School

Do you have a best or favorite friend? Who?
 What is the best thing you guys do together?
 What is the best thing about your friends? What kinds of things do you do?
 If you won a trip to Disneyland and could take six kids with you, who would you take?
 Why?
 Who is the nicest kid in your school?
 Is there someone in your school everyone is afraid of?
 How do you feel about school?
 Who do you go to if you have problems in school?
 What is your favorite sport? Tell me about why you like it.
 What do you do after school?
 What kinds of groups are at your school?
 What kinds of things do they do there?
 What are kids like at your school?
 What kinds of things do you do at recess?
 Who did you eat lunch with today (or yesterday)? Is that what you usually do?
 If you could be principal for a day, what would you do?
 How many schools have you been to? Where do you currently go?
 What kind of homework do you get?
 Who can you go to for help with your homework?
 Do you know if all of your credits have transferred?
 When do you graduate?
 Do you have an IEP (individual education plan)?

What do you want to do when you graduate? College? Vocation school? Job?
 What are you doing to achieve these future goals? For example, taking SATs, applying to colleges/vocational schools, internships, etc.

Family

Tell me about who is in your family.
 Who do you live with?
 What relatives do you get to see?
 What do you like to do best with your father? Your mother? Your sister? Your brother?
 Etc.
 If you could change one thing about your father (mother, sister, brother, etc), what would it be?
 Tell me about a typical Saturday in your family?
 Tell me about dinnertime at your house?
 What time do you go to bed at night? Is that different on school nights and weekend nights?
 How do you celebrate your birthday in your family?
 What is your favorite holiday? How does your family celebrate it?
 What does your family do for fun?
 What is one thing from your family that you want to make sure to do with your own family one day?
 What is one thing your parents do that you would never do when you are a parent?
 How would your family describe you?
 Tell me about your room? What color is it? Where do you sleep? What kind of stuff do you have in there?
 Tell me about your foster family?
 Have you lived with a foster family before? Tell me what that was like.

Health/Fitness

When was the last time you saw a doctor?
 What is your doctor's name?
 Do you know your doctor's phone number or how to get in touch with him or her?
 When was the last time you saw a dentist?
 What is your dentist's name?
 Do you know your dentist's phone number or how to get in touch with him or her?
 Do you have any health issues?
 Do you understand what it means to have that health condition?
 Has someone explained your treatment to you?
 Has anyone helped you understand and take care of your health issues?
 Do you take any medicines? Is so, what kind? How do they help you?
 Are you involved with someone?
 Do you know you can get confidential services for your sexual health?
 Has anyone told you where you can get any of these services if you want them?
 Have you taken a sex education class or talked to anyone about sex?
 Has anyone talked to you about safe sex practices?
 Do you have sex with anyone? If you do, what do you do to practice safe sex?

Is there someone you can talk to about your health issues?

What do you do to practice safe sex?

What do you do for exercise?

Do you play any sports?

What do you wish you could play?

Hints to Involving Kids in the Court

Infancy

Their presence at occasional court proceedings helps the child become "known" to the court personnel.

If the child cannot be present, there should be someone there who "knows" the child fully and has spent enough time with the child to bring him/her to life for the court. This designee should be allowed to speak in the proceedings.

Repeated visits over time help the people to remember the child is growing fast and changing rapidly.

The child needs to become a person with a name.

If child cannot be present, a picture of the child should be shared so it is clear who is being discussed.

Plan any appearances during low stress times i.e. not during child's usual nap time; make sure they have eaten; make sure their diaper is clean; allow them access to someone they trust and feel comfortable with.

Choose quiet court times, i.e. no chaos, high emotional intensity, or exposure to conflict.

Learn a basic child's finger game, i.e. Open them Shut them or Where is thumbkin? to create opportunities to engage when needed.

Judges and attorneys must have an understanding of early childhood development

Toddlerhood

All of above

Can meet judge and other personnel involved in the system.

Can identify key people in their life, through in person contacts as well as pictures (developmentally dependent).

Have simple toys available, i.e. blocks or crayons/paper, this allows for something to mutually focus on, helping child to regulate and feel more comfortable.

Learn a typical child's game or song, i.e. All around the mulberry bush..., this provides a medium to engage with

Learn something about the child that they like and comment, i.e. I heard you liked cars...

Preschool

All of above

Have simple toys available, i.e. blocks, preschool sized legos, crayons/paper, markers, bingo daubers (great for making dots)—repetitive focused activity helps to manage anxiety

Can tell the court personnel stories of good things they have done, as well as what scares them (should be done one on one with child accompanied by someone they see as trusted)

May be able to draw their thoughts, although not always decipherable without child interpreting for you.

Has knowledge to begin to know role of a judge and others, have beginning understanding that there are authority figures that have roles in our lives.

Give simple explanations, follow child's lead, answer in no more than 5 words per answer, give adequate time for processing and response.

Learn a preschool game or song, something that can be interacted with. An alternative is to engage child by "remembering" most of a song yourself, then asking child for help "remembering" the rest; this gives child a sense of control and knowledge—preschoolers like to feel smart and helpful

If child goes into courtroom, allow exploration—checking things out, looking behind tables and benches, sit in chairs, etc.

Learn about something the child has accomplished lately and comment, i.e. I heard you can write your name all by yourself

Early School Age

All of above

Encourage role playing, i.e. sit at tables, call court to order, etc. Imagination is very alive for this age.

Encourage questions, answer with basic answers, and then ask "do you have another question?"

Comment on how great the questions are, this encourages and it provides a sense of control and competence

Provide age appropriate description of the court process (E.g. coloring book with judge, lawyer, and all parties included; video with cartoon characters describing a day in court)

May be in court for general issues and proceedings, however avoid any conflict, chaos, or hostility

If child is asked to talk with any caregiver present, focus on what is their favorite thing they may have done with that person; find out ahead of time what child may have done and explore that topic, i.e. "I heard you and your dad played went to a baseball game last night...how was it?"

Court appearances should be brief; no more than 10-15 minutes—be aware of antsy behavior such as squirming, shuffling, laying down, fussing, etc.—follow this child's lead; you see these things it is time to go before child has to escalate to get your attention.

Ask about school, friends, activities

School Age

All of above

Should be very able to meet with judge or attorneys, may want support person of their choosing with them.

Provide them with tasks such as making a list of what they want the judge to know, what their favorite things go do include, etc. —again provides control opportunity, lists can provide something tangible, and having a paper to share can decrease anxiety. Pictures of things can also be shared if writing skills are not well developed.

Allow the child to give the writings and/or pictures to the court; make sure they know their input was received and noted by the court

Reassure child he/she is in no way responsible for any of the court proceedings or events.

Participation in court proceedings should be encouraged, keep brief—no more than 30-60 minutes; focus on proceedings that do not include conflict, non-compliance issues, etc.

Ask about accomplishments, ideas about things, what happens in their school, etc.

Depending on individual circumstances the child may want to be involved in all proceedings. The child should be encouraged to articulate why they want to be there and how they feel they might contribute. This provides structure and forethought and will make the hearing more meaningful for the court and the child.

Pre-Adolescent

All of the above

Provide child with a task, i.e. taking notes during proceedings they are present for, etc.—helps to focus attention and dissipate anxiety

Should be able to meet and talk with judges/lawyers/others; a support person may still be requested

May need clear limits on how to behave in a court room or during certain events

Opinions should be encouraged, however limits may need to be set as arguments for the sake of arguing can be a highlight of this age group

Provide an "escape" plan, if child gets upset is it okay for them to leave or ask to go to the bathroom, giving them escape plans and other coping mechanisms provides a sense of control
Encourage them to participate in even the smallest way, again this increases a sense of control
Share documents that are appropriate for child to read, this increases awareness and sense of control

Ask about their peers, teachers, etc.

Adolescent

All of the above

Autonomy is critical at this age, provide any opportunity to participate and share
Depending on individual circumstances the child may want to be involved in all proceedings; however, the child should be able to articulate why they want to be there and how they feel they might contribute—this provides some structure and forethought, hopefully avoiding the child who is wanting to "get back at" a parent

Respect child's feelings, even if they want to participate, the emotional intensity might become too much and they may opt out at the last minute; having thoughts and ideas written out may allow them to have that shared or read to the court even if they don't want to be there—or they may want to be there but have someone else read their words

Adolescents are often very peer oriented, it may be appropriate for a "best friend" to accompany them depending on the events taking place (or at least waiting in the hall)—sometimes having someone to "show" things to can help increase feelings of competency and control.

Negotiation can be used fairly well with many adolescents—their ability to think about meeting someone halfway allows them a sense of control and a sense of accomplishment

As often as possible, child should be communicated with directly

Ask about their future plans, interests, etc.